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[Brown says Raimondo's fundraising creates 'culture' of corruption](#)

“The amount of money she has raked in from corporations, from executives of corporations who at the same time are receiving special tax breaks and benefits from the state is a corruption of our democratic system,” says the Democratic gubernatorial candidate.

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — Faced with a barrage of attack ads from his better-funded Democratic primary opponent, gubernatorial candidate Matt Brown on Wednesday nearly accused Gov. Gina Raimondo of corruption while proposing to push for new campaign finance laws if elected.

“Under Governor Raimondo, there’s an unwritten rule: if you want a government subsidy or tax incentive, you have to donate to her,” Brown said in a news release under the heading “Raimondo’s corruption.”

But at a State House news conference Wednesday, Brown did not provide evidence of an actual quid pro quo in the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation of state government and indicated that Raimondo’s prodigious corporate fundraising was a corruption of the system — even if not illegal.

“The amount of money she has raked in from corporations, from executives of corporations who at the same time are receiving special tax breaks and benefits from the state is a corruption of our democratic system,” Brown said when asked multiple times if he was accusing Raimondo of criminal behavior. “That is an instance where our government is clearly looking out for corporations and Wall Street interests instead of looking out for the people.”

Campaign staff clarified that the fundraising created a “culture” of corruption that he would end by not accepting donations from corporate PACs, lobbyists or companies with business before the state.

With Raimondo’s corporate connections in the foreground, Brown proposed a series of campaign finance reform policies — many of which state lawmakers have tried unsuccessfully to pass in recent years — including banning campaign contributions from lobbyists or executives of companies with state contracts, state incentives and regulatory matter before the state.

He also proposed beefing up the enforcement resources of the Board of Elections, linking state financial with campaign databases and making candidates pledge not to coordinate with independent expenditure groups. Coordination between candidates and outside groups is already illegal, but Brown said candidates often escape consequences when coordination is found.

Brown’s ethics announcement came a day after his campaign’s lawyer wrote a cease and desist letter to Raimondo asking her to stop airing ads that accuse him of stiffing campaign workers in his 2006 Senate campaign.

Although Raimondo's financial advantage has given her a near monopoly on pre-primary Democratic advertising, outside groups have also jumped in to help her with mailers linking Brown to "money laundering" or saying he "nuked" his old nonprofit Global Zero against an image of a mushroom cloud.

To support his claim that Raimondo engages in "pay to play," the Brown campaign cited the lengthy list of donations, which they say adds up to \$430,000, from employees of businesses that have received incentives from the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation, or law firms that represent them, since she took office in 2015.

The names are familiar to most Rhode Islanders: General Dynamics, CVS, Citizens Bank, law firm Adler Pollock & Sheehan and developer The Procaccianti Group.

Although \$430,000 is real money in a small state, it's only roughly 3 percent of the more than \$12 million Raimondo has raised since 2013.

The Brown campaign also decried \$3 million in "dark money" that has been channeled through political action committee to support Raimondo over the years, although many of the donors have been disclosed, making them no longer "dark."

Raimondo campaign spokeswoman Emily Samsel responded to Brown's attack with this statement calling the former secretary of state "unhinged" and circling back to Brown's 2006 campaign-finance problems.

"Matt Brown is a remarkably negative and angry candidate, and he is becoming increasingly unhinged as another one of his failed campaigns comes to an end. Brown knows Governor Raimondo follows every rule and law that governs campaigns," Samsel wrote in an email. "If Brown were sincere about wanting to clean up the system, he would never have used a loophole in the law during his last campaign, by raising money into the Hawaii, Maine and Massachusetts Democratic parties to enable his max-out donors to give his campaign more money than the law intends."

"The FEC may have concluded Brown didn't break the law. But that doesn't make it right and it was an embarrassment to our state," she added.

[For Missouri lawmakers, September's veto session means money time](#)

While it remains unclear whether Missouri lawmakers will try to override any of Gov. Mike Parson's vetoes when they reconvene next week, their annual early autumn return to the capital city likely will be another lucrative one.

In a year when all of the seats in the House and half of the seats in the Senate are up for grabs, more than 70 lawmakers have scheduled fundraisers just blocks away from the Capitol during the week of the one-day session, as [well as a special session](#), on Sept. 12.

Take Rep. Shamed Dogan, R-Ballwin, for example. He and former Rep. Sheila Solon, who is running for a seat representing the St. Joseph area, are having a joint reception at the offices of their campaign consultant on High Street, the main drag of Jefferson City's downtown.

Across the street at a restaurant, Rep. Elijah Haahr, a Republican from Springfield who will serve as speaker of the House next year, is being joined by Rep. Dan Houx and Rep. Rocky Miller in a fundraiser.

And, around the corner, Republican Justin Brown of Rolla, who is trying to replace his father, Dan, in the Senate, will be hosting a reception at Madison's Café, a popular Italian eatery just steps from the Governor's Mansion.

In all, between Monday and Wednesday, at least 25 different events are scheduled for lawmakers and candidates for the Legislature to build campaign war chests.

It's not [new for the veto session to be a prime time](#) for raising campaign cash. A Post-Dispatch review found a similar number of fundraisers in the days surrounding the 2017 veto session. In 2015, the newspaper counted about 60 lawmakers involved in at least 18 separate fundraising events.

Missouri is among about half of the states where fundraising is not banned while the Legislature is in session. The rationale is that, if it looks bad to receive political contributions from the industries and causes whose issues are affected by lawmakers' political decisions, then it looks even worse to receive those contributions in the capital city while the lawmakers are gathering to discuss some of those very issues.

Other states have more unique prohibitions. In Illinois, for example, no fundraisers are allowed when lawmakers are in session within the border of Sangamon County, which is home to the capital city of Springfield.

The annual rite of autumn, which can yield some of the largest one-time hauls of cash for lawmakers, is not being targeted in legislation nor in an ethics referendum on the November ballot.

The referendum sponsored by the group Clean Missouri would bar most gifts from lobbyists, limit campaign contributions and change the way the state draws its legislative districts.

"Anything that can be done to keep our legislators focused on who they're supposed to represent — and limit the influence of lobbyists and big money donors — is worth considering," Clean Missouri spokesman Benjamin Singer said. "We do believe that legislative candidates [soliciting funds at the Capitol and on state property should be illegal](#), which presumably could include inviting people to fundraisers that will take place off Capitol grounds but during the session."

Dogan, who is facing a [challenge from Democrat Charles Triplett, of Ellisville](#), said raising money in the days surrounding the veto session is different than holding a fundraiser during the regular session that runs from January to May.

"Usually, you don't have a lot of substantive debate going on in the veto session," Dogan said.

"It's not like we're doing a veto session based on a big Boeing bill and there are Boeing lobbyists dropping off big checks."

Dogan says he believes the culture of the Capitol has changed in the past decade.

"In some cases, lobbyists have prohibited themselves from contributing money to lawmakers during the session," he said.

[American political consultant admits foreign money was funneled to Trump inaugural](#)

An American political consultant who is cooperating with federal prosecutors admitted in court Friday that he steered \$50,000 from a Ukrainian politician to Donald Trump's inaugural committee — the first public confirmation that illegal foreign money was used to help fund the January 2017 event.

W. Samuel Patten, 47, pleaded guilty Friday to failing to register as a foreign lobbyist while working on behalf of a Ukrainian political party. He says he was helped by a Russian national who has been linked to Russian intelligence by U.S. prosecutors and who was also an associate of former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort.

As part of his plea deal, Patten agreed to assist prosecutors, including special counsel Robert S. Mueller III, who is investigating whether Trump's campaign coordinated with Russia during the 2016 campaign.

Mueller has been probing whether foreign money flowed into the coffers of Trump's inaugural committee, which raised more than \$100 million, and Patten's plea offers the first clear evidence that it occurred.

Patten said [in court documents](#) that he arranged for an American citizen to act as a "straw donor" to give \$50,000 in exchange for four tickets to Trump's inauguration in place of a Ukrainian businessman, who as a foreigner was barred from contributing to the event.

Patten's cooperation could give Mueller a window into how foreigners sought access to the inauguration. Patten also knows a number of key players in the investigation, particularly among political consultants who were active in Ukraine with Manafort.

Patten, left, leaves court in Washington after pleading guilty to failing to register as a foreign lobbyist. (Win McNamee/Getty Images)

Trump's inauguration was attended by an unusually large number of prominent foreign business leaders, particularly Russian moguls whose attendance drew the attention of the FBI at the time.

Patten's case was handled by prosecutors with the U.S. attorney's office in Washington and the Justice Department's national security division after a referral from Mueller's office. The case was listed in court documents as related to Mueller's probe of Manafort.

Prosecutors contended that Patten formed a company with a Russian national, identified only as "Foreigner A," to engage in lobbying and political consulting services.

The company has received about \$1 million since 2015 for its Ukraine consulting work, which included advising a Ukrainian party known as the Opposition Bloc, as well as some of its members, one of whom is a prominent Ukraine businessman identified only as "Foreigner B."

Sam Patten, serving as a political strategist for Iraq's then-Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq, on a plane in Amman, Jordan, en route to Baghdad in 2014. (Richard Leiby/The Washington Post)

Prosecutors said Patten helped the businessman get meetings to lobby members of Congress in 2015 and helped him author an op-ed in February 2017 that appears to match a [U.S. News & World Report article](#) arguing that Ukraine would do fine under President Trump.

The description of "Foreigner A" matches Konstantin Kilimnik, a longtime Manafort associate who has been charged in Washington along with Manafort with obstruction of justice and witness tampering. Prosecutors have said they believe that Kilimnik has ties to Russian intelligence. Kilimnik has denied any such ties

The description of "Foreigner B" matches Serhiy Lovochkin, a Ukrainian businessman and politician who served as a top aide to former Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich, a pro-Russian politician who was Manafort's chief client.

Patten told prosecutors that he worked with Kilimnik to help Lovochkin route the illegal donation to Trump's inauguration. As a result of the donation, four tickets to Trump's festivities were allocated to the three men and another Ukrainian; prosecutors said Lovochkin attended the event with Patten. Prosecutors do not say whether Kilimnik attended.

Patten also agreed that he misled the Senate Intelligence Committee when he testified before the panel in January.

Kilimnik did not respond to a request for comment from The Washington Post. Lovochkin's office said he attended the inauguration but didn't make the \$50,000 payment.

Patten appeared in front of U.S. District Judge Amy Berman Jackson on Friday with his attorney, Stuart A. Sears. After surrendering his passport, he was released on his own recognizance pending sentencing.

In a plea agreement read aloud by the judge, Patten agreed to cooperate in exchange for a government recommendation of leniency at sentencing. The plea deal filed in court shows that he has agreed to assist Mueller as well as the D.C. prosecutors who filed the case against him. The charge carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison, but both sides agreed there is no recommended sentence under federal guidelines.

Andrew Weissmann, a lawyer on Mueller's team who has been leading the Manafort prosecution, was present in court when Patten pleaded guilty. He declined to comment after the hearing.

[Mueller accuses Paul Manafort, Konstantin Kilimnik of witness tampering]

Rudolph W. Giuliani, the former New York mayor now serving as Trump's personal attorney, played down the importance of the Patten case in a statement Friday.

"This convinces me more than anything that Mueller needs to close up shop," Giuliani said.

"Next thing he'll do is parking tickets in Russia. Trump has no idea who these contributors are. If these are illegal contributors, I had a hundred of them. Obama had a thousand. We have no idea who these contributors are."

Mueller has been referring to other prosecutors cases that do not appear to directly relate to his core mission of exploring Trump campaign contacts with Russia. His team referred an investigation of Ukraine political work by two other Manafort associates, lobbyists Tony Podesta and Vin Weber, to prosecutors in New York.

Manafort, 69, has pleaded not guilty to all charges in the Washington case, which relates to his political work and alleged attempts to hide income from 2006 to 2017. Prosecutors allege that during that time, he laundered \$30 million as a consultant for pro-Russian politicians in Ukraine. The trial in that case is set to start Sept. 24

Patten has a varied résumé. He worked in the oil sector in Kazakhstan in the mid-to-late 1990s and served as Maine campaign director for George W. Bush's 2000 presidential campaign. He also briefly worked at the State Department under Bush and worked as a political consultant in Iraq assisting officials there in the post-Saddam Hussein period.

On Facebook, Patten said he deeply regretted "any damage my failure to register has done to the transparency the [Foreign Agents Registration Act] statute seeks to guarantee."

"I apologize for the embarrassment this lapse in my own high professional standards has caused my family, my friends and my past and present work associates," he wrote.

He also worked at the Oregon office of Cambridge Analytica's parent company, SCL Group, on voter targeting in the 2014 midterm election cycle, according to the Daily Beast, which said he described his work as developing "microtargeting" technologies "adopted by at least one major U.S. presidential candidate."

The Trump campaign hired Cambridge Analytica in August 2016 to assist with its online targeting. The company was affiliated at the time with Trump strategist Stephen K. Bannon.

In a 2017 interview with The Post, Patten said he met Kilimnik in Moscow more than 15 years ago, when Kilimnik was an employee of the International Republican Institute, a pro-democracy group affiliated with the U.S. Republican Party. Patten ran the office from 2001 to 2004. "I relied on him," Patten told The Post.

Kilimnik left IRI around 2005 to work for Manafort in Kiev, the Ukrainian capital, starting as the American consultant's translator and eventually being named manager of Manafort's Ukrainian office. Patten praised Kilimnik at the time as a person who helped Manafort navigate the complicated Ukrainian political scene.

Beyond his work as a translator, Patten told The Post, Kilimnik would "help Manafort understand the political context and why people were doing what they were doing."

"I would think that Manafort would have been useless there without Kostya," he said, using a nickname for Kilimnik.

In 2015, Patten and Kilimnik jointly formed a company incorporated in Washington called Begemot Ventures International. Begemot, which means "hippo" in Russian, is the name of the mischievous cat who pals around with the devil in the celebrated Russian novel "The Master and Margarita."

Patten was born into a milieu of social climbing and Washington power politics. He is the grandson of the late Georgetown doyenne Susan Mary Alsop.

Patten told The Post in 2014 that a visit by the newly inaugurated President John F. Kennedy to the Alsop home on Dumbarton Street NW, hours after many of the festivities, confirmed the social prominence of his grandmother and his step-grandfather, the political columnist Joseph Alsop.

Patten's father moved to Maine, ran a small-town weekly newspaper and later became a prison minister. Patten was schooled in Maine and attended Georgetown University, graduating in 1993.

[CEOs gave heavily during legislative session, exposing loophole in NC's fundraising ban](#)

The co-chief executives at a Georgia firm that brokers tax credits put \$41,000 into the campaign accounts of North Carolina General Assembly members during the last regular legislative session.

This is allowed under North Carolina law, despite the state's partial fundraising ban during session. That law simply forbids donations from lobbyists and the entities that hire them. It's Monarch Capital that has the team of seven lobbyists in Raleigh, not Monarch's top two executives, George Strobel and Robin Delmer.

Add in the week before session began, and the two businessmen gave more than \$87,000 to Republican legislators and the North Carolina Republican Party, a key cog in the campaign

machine this year as the two major parties fight for control of the General Assembly in November's elections.

The men have not said what fuels their interest in North Carolina politics. Delmer did not return calls. In a brief phone interview, Strobel said they were "just trying to make friends." Their company lists 46 North Carolina solar facilities on its website, and the firm also deals in film, housing and historic redevelopment tax credits.

North Carolina law lets CEOs and other top executives contribute to campaigns during General Assembly sessions even as it bans donations from the companies themselves year round and forbids anyone who contracts directly with a lobbyist from giving during session. Legislators who defend the system say you can't limit what individuals give, though the law does just that, year round, for lobbyists themselves.

This year's legislative session also saw significant donations from hog farmers and beer distributors, both industries with important legislation before the General Assembly. Senate President Pro Tem

[Phil Berger](#)

's campaign alone raised nearly \$222,000 during session. Twenty-three people gave him the maximum allowed: \$5,200.

All told during the six-week General Assembly session, more than \$1.1 million flowed into state legislators' campaign accounts. That's a conservative figure, reached by backing out money that simply flowed from one politician's campaign to another and money elected officials put into their own campaigns.

Add in donations to the two main political parties and to a handful of other large fundraising vehicles for state legislative races, and the in-session giving topped \$3.4 million. Gov. Roy Cooper's main campaign account brought in another \$407,000 during session.

Running contribution total

Jan 1

Jan 31

Mar 2

Apr 1

May 1

May 31

Jul 1

\$0

\$2,000,000

\$4,000,000

\$6,000,000

\$8,000,000

\$10,000,000

\$12,000,000

\$14,000,000

Candidates	Parties
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SESSION ENDS

SESSION BEGINS

Despite a ban on some contributions during legislative sessions in North Carolina, a WRAL analysis of campaign finance data from the first half of the year show that donations slowed to sitting lawmakers, but increased to party committees. Running totals here are the most conservative estimates of political contributions, excluding all transfers between candidate and party committees to avoid double-counting.

Source: State Board of Elections and Ethics Enforcement

[Read the methodology](#) // [Get the data](#)

The totals go up again if you include the week before session, which is traditionally a time for fundraisers as political action committees with lobbyists deliver checks just under the wire. This year, the week saw more than \$1 million given to state legislative campaigns, the state Republican and Democratic parties and the governor's campaign account.

Berger, R-Rockingham, brought in about \$60,000 that week. House Speaker

[Tim Moore](#)

's campaign account collected more than \$72,000. Both men declined interview requests on these issues.

A WRAL News analysis of campaign finance filings also turned up \$16,000 in donations to legislative campaigns during session from 15 PACs with a lobbyist. Each would appear to be a violation of state fundraising rules, but spokespeople for most of the PACs, or the companies they represent, said there was a simple explanation: The checks were written before session.

This is a common explanation, with campaigns saying checks aren't always logged when received. BB&T said its questionable contribution, \$2,000 through the bank's PAC to Senate Rules Chairman

[Bill Rabon](#)

, R-Brunswick, was delivered at 9:30 a.m. May 16. A bank spokesman said it had a delivery receipt to prove it.

The session began at noon that day. The spokesman said BB&T makes "every effort to ensure that all contributions conform to the letter and the spirit of the law."

'Unfortunate clerical mistake'

More than a third of the PAC money logged during session went to Rabon's campaign.

He and other legislators who received donations told WRAL News that, if they were truly made during session, they'd return the money. Earlier this year, the State Board of Elections and Ethics Enforcement ordered more than 30 legislative campaigns, plus Cooper's, to forfeit more than \$53,000 in 2016 and 2017 in-session donations made by Pfizer's political action committee.

The pharmaceutical company said later that, though the checks were dated during session, they weren't sent until after session. It blamed "an unfortunate clerical mistake by an outside vendor"

for the problem. Moore's campaign treasurer wrote the elections board asking how a check can be considered a contribution before it's received, but nevertheless, the campaign forfeited \$3,500.

This year, 18 of the top 20 donors to legislators during the week before session were PACs. The other two were Strobel and Delmer.

Rep.

[Jason Saine](#)

, R-Lincoln, whose campaign got \$5,000 from each man during session, said they're interested in an issue before the state Department of Revenue. A department spokesman said state rules on taxpayer privacy prohibited him from confirming anything. Sen.

[Brent Jackson](#)

, R-Sampson, who also received donations from the duo, said they're interested in solar tax credits, which the state phased out in 2015.

Lobbyists for Strobel and Delmer's company didn't return WRAL News' calls.

Jackson said he hadn't thought of donations from company executives as a way around the in-session ban on donations from entities with lobbyists. Rabon, who also got \$5,000 from each man during session, said he doesn't see a problem with the arrangement.

"The Democrats wrote the law," Rabon said. "What do I think the law should be? I think anyone should be able to give as much as they want, at any time, and it should be disclosed that day."

Beer distributors also gave during session. Mark Craig, the president of distributor R.H. Barringer, put more than \$30,000 into state legislative campaigns during the six-week period, including the maximum \$5,200 to Berger. He was the top individual donor to legislative campaigns during session.

"No comment on anything, but thank you," Craig said when WRAL News asked about the donations.

R.H. Barringer's board chair, Jasie Barringer, donated another \$8,200 in-session, and Teresa Craig kicked in another \$5,200 to Berger. The North Carolina Beer & Wine Wholesalers Association PAC gave \$18,400 during the week before session and on opening day.

The PAC split this money between Berger, Moore, R-Cleveland, the North Carolina Democratic Party and a pair of Republican committees raising money to protect GOP majorities in the House and the Senate: the Senate Majority Fund and the House Republican Campaign Committee.

These committees are controlled by top chamber leadership and function under essentially the same rules as the state parties. They can accept unlimited donations from individuals and PACs.

Beer wholesalers fight annually to protect laws that require brewers to work through a distributor once they sell 25,000 barrels of beer a year. This year, they won a battle against large breweries, changing several laws governing relationships between the two, including rules on the transfer of distribution rights.

Scott Prestage, with Prestage Farms, gave Moore's campaign \$5,200 right at the end of session, after the General Assembly passed legislation meant to make lawsuits against hog farms harder to win. Going back to the beginning of the year, people connected to Prestage Farms gave Moore

\$31,000 in campaign donations. Half are dated two-and-a-half months before the session began. The rest came in the session's closing days or the day after the session ended.

They gave another \$4,000 in late March and early April to state Rep.

[Jimmy Dixon](#)

, R-Duplin, a farmer who championed the lawsuit protection bill this year.

Officials with Prestage Farms declined WRAL News' interview requests.

Smithfield Foods' PAC gave another \$10,000 to various legislators and the state Republican and Democratic parties, some just before, some just after the session began. The North Carolina Pork Council gave \$10,000 during session to the state Republican Party and \$5,000 right at the session's start to the Democrats.

Both of these party committees can raise money during session, including from "lobbyist principals," the name in state code for people who employ lobbyists.

Similar rules apply to the so-called "affiliated party committees," including the Senate Majority Fund, the N.C. House Republican Campaign Committee and the Republican Council of State Committee, a fundraising vehicle headed by Lt. Gov. Dan Forest.

Ban has an effect

Despite loopholes, it's clear the partial session ban depresses fundraising. Giving peaks right before session, then falls off a cliff.

Weekly contributions

\$0

\$500,000

\$1,000,000

\$1,500,000

\$2,000,000

Candidates Parties

SESSION BEGINS

Contributions to sitting lawmakers shows a steep decline entering into the start of the legislative session, a WRAL analysis of campaign finance data from the first half of the year shows. But right as the session begins, donations to party committees sees a sharp spike before leveling off. Weekly totals here are the most conservative estimates of political contributions, excluding all transfers between candidate and party committees to avoid double-counting

Source: State Board of Elections and Ethics Enforcement

[Read the methodology](#) // [Get the data](#)

There was a major bump during the first week of session this year for the state parties, but that's because three large donors – LinkedIn co-founder Reid Hoffman, Durham investor Greg Lindberg and Lindberg's Eli Research company – donated \$1.3 million that week to the state Republican and Democrat parties.

Eli Research's donation went to the Democratic Party's building fund, which, unlike the normal party committee, can accept direct donations from businesses.

Other big donations went to Forest's Republican Council of State Committee, which reported a \$100,000 donation at the end of session from Phil Drake, of Drake Software, and a \$25,000 donation two days before the session from George Luecke, an executive with one of Lindberg's companies.

The N.C. House Republican Campaign Committee and the N.C. Senate Majority Fund didn't do any major fundraising during the session, other than \$2,500 the House committee logged from the beer distributors PAC on the first day of the session. The Senate committee accepted \$2,500 from the beer and wine wholesalers the day before the session began, as well as \$1,000 from Smithfield Foods' PAC.

None of this accounts for the dark money that flows through North Carolina politics. These nonprofits flood the airwaves with political ads most election seasons, and they're supposed to operate separate from political candidates, though their paths often cross.

Cooper, for example, [attended a fundraiser for Moving NC Forward](#), a group run by some of the same people who worked in his 2016 campaign, the day after last year's legislative session. More than 100 bills from that session awaited his review and signature at the time.

Surprising and troubling

Despite his role as a watchdog for 17 years, Common Cause North Carolina Executive Director Bob Phillips said he was surprised, and troubled, to hear how much money flows during the legislative session.

Letting corporate executives donate despite other session fundraising bans is "sort of like a loophole you could drive a Mack truck through," Phillips said.

Bill Gilkeson, a retired General Assembly attorney now with Bailey & Dixon, said CEO donations sound like "a good way to get somebody's attention" during session.

WRAL News consulted Gilkeson and Greensboro attorney Marshall Hurley, a former general counsel for the state GOP, to verify aspects of state campaign finance law.

The state's partial in-session ban came into law in the 1990s. Republican 3rd District Congressman Walter Jones, who pushed for reforms while in the state House, said he hopes the laws he helped pass have done some good, "even if it's been in a very modest way." Reform is always a hard sell, Jones said, and laws only do so much.

"You always find people that will find a way to get around a law," he said.

Some called those reforms "the lobbyist protection act," Gilkeson said. Before that, "it almost seemed like a shakedown of lobbyists," he said.

Like Phillips, House Majority Leader

[John Bell](#)

, R-Wayne, said he was surprised to learn how much money changes hands during the session. He said state leaders probably need to review the laws on the books.

Phillips said money changing hands doesn't mean something nefarious is going on, but you might have "a hard time convincing an average citizen of that."

"Why would these folks be giving?" he asked. "Does anyone want to answer that question?"

Hurley likened political money to a balloon.

"You squeeze here with regulation, there's going to be a bubble somewhere else," he said. "It's a long way to a foolproof and perfect system."

Even the concept of an in-session ban, Hurley said, "in itself is flawed."

"All it's really done is change the date of the check," he said. "Does that really alter behavior?"

[AT&T's Top Anti-Net Neutrality Lobbyist In California Doesn't Register As A Lobbyist](#)

We've noted for years how U.S. lobbying laws and restrictions are essentially **hot garbage**, and are routinely laughed at by some of the country's largest corporations. The legal DC definition of a lobbyist was beefed up slightly back in 2007, when the Lobbyist Disclosure Act was notably amended by the Leadership and Open Government Act of 2007. Those changes required that if an employee spends more than 20% of their time lobbying, they have to register with the government as a lobbyist, detail their travel with lawmakers, and more fully outline their contributions to politicians and their myriad foundations.

But many lobbyists responded to those changes by just changing their title or calling their lobbying... something else. We've examined, for example, how Comcast's top lobbyist David Cohen shifted his title to "**Chief Diversity Officer**" in order to skirt around that 20% restriction. Cohen often can frequently be seen **holding press junkets** heralding Comcast's altruism because it offered some discounted broadband connections to the poor to get its NBC Universal merger approved. But the lion's share of Cohen's time is spent lobbying local lawmakers during these junkets.

Comcast, it's worth noting, gets **really mad when you point this out**.

State lobbying restrictions, as you might imagine, aren't much better. Another lobbying juggernaut in the telecom space, AT&T, has also found itself under fire for lobbyists who pretend **not** to be lobbyists. The company's top lobbyist in California, Vice President of Legislative Affairs Bill Devine, has **never registered as a lobbyist** under California law. Devine has spent a lot of time lately lobbying to kill efforts in California to pass net neutrality law (you know, for freedom!), without adhering to lobbying requirements:

"By not registering as a lobbyist, Devine can take advantage of political influence techniques that registered lobbyists are banned from under California laws. The Political Reform Act of 1974 requires registered lobbyists to disclose their lobbying activity expenses to the state. It also bans them from giving gifts worth more than \$10 to state, legislative and agency officials. Under Proposition 34, enacted in 2000, registered lobbyists are also banned from making campaign contributions."

Devine's lobbying lambada was noticed courtesy of an anonymous complaint filed with the California Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC):

"William H. Devine, an AT&T Vice President, unlawfully fails to register as a lobbyist, despite spending the majority of his time in the Capitol Building talking to lawmakers and staff in order to influence legislation. It is an open secret in the Capitol building that Mr. Devine is an undeclared AT&T lobbyist."

"Mr. Devine hides his lobbyist status by setting up meetings under other AT&T employee and lobbyist names," the complaint alleges. "In particular, Mr. Devine has recently been lobbying

legislators on SB 822 and SB 460. On information and belief, Mr. Devine attended numerous meetings with other AT&T lobbyists, employees and grant beneficiaries, including, but not limited to, employees of CalInnovates (paid by AT&T to work against SB 822/SB 460) and a researcher paid by CalInnovate, David Sosa. He may also have accompanied Mark Kleeman, a fellow at University of California – San Diego."

This isn't really complicated. Devine has been paid \$117,000 so far this biennial legislative session by AT&T for lobbying-related activities, most notably related to AT&T's lobbying against the state's two net neutrality laws, SB 822 and SB 460. He coordinates routinely with other AT&T lobbyists, and works hand in hand with the various policy groups, think tankers and consultants AT&T uses as proxies for its messaging, including that outfit that was just busted trying to [scare grandmothers away from net neutrality](#) via misleading robocalls.

The FPPC has given Devine 14 days to respond to the complaint. But if history is any indication, it's likely no punishment will materialize. Because despite our collective, bipartisan chirping about how grotesque American lobbying and corruption is, these sort of things tend to float in one ear and out the other of the collective American consciousness. It's also kind of hard to improve state and national lobbying rules, when you've got an ocean of lobbyists consultants, think tankers, chief diversity officers, liaisons, and others lobbying *courageously striving* to keep that from happening.